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## THE "GOTHS" IN THE KENSINGTON INSCRIPTION

Twenty-four years ago a farmer was clearing land in an obscure and timbered wilderness of Minnesota. While engaged in grubbing stumps, he found enfolded in the close grasp of an old tree a large stone, almost three feet long, covered on two sides with mystic characters. The stone was sent to two universities, and photographs were sent to many scholars in both Europe and America. This publicity brought out the fact that the inscription contained runic characters—the style of script commonly used in inscriptions on stone and wood by all Northern European peoples hundreds of years ago. Among the large number of scholars who received photographs of the stone, none were found, strange to say, who were able to read the entire inscription. This illustrates how little the subject of runic script is understood, and what uncommon knowledge the writer of the inscription must have possessed, if it be a forgery. Finally the stone was returned to its finder, condemned as a hoax, due chiefly to the misconceptions arrived at through the fragmentary and faulty translations of the inscription.

Ten years later the stone by accident came again to the notice of the public, and the entire inscription was translated. It was found to contain the following dramatic message:

8 göter ok 22 norrmen po opþagelsefarþ fro vinlanþ of vest vi haþe læger veþ 2 skjar en þags rise norr fro þeno sten vi var ok fiske en þagh æptir vi kom hem fan 10 man röþe af bloþ og þeþ A V M fræse af illy har 10 mans ve havet at se æptir vore skip 14 þagh rise from þeno öh ahr 1362.

Rendered into English the inscription reads as follows:

Eight Goths and twenty-two Norsemen on (an) exploration-journey from Vinland through the western regions. We had camp by two skerries one day's journey north from this stone. We were (out) and fished one day. When we came home (we) found ten men, red with blood and dead. Ave Maria! Save us from evil!

(We) have ten of our party by the sea to look for our vessel, fourteen days-journeys from this island. Year 1362.

Since then this inscription has been the subject of lively discussion in many distinguished circles.

When the inscription was first completely translated in 1908 it was subjected to very severe criticism by almost all scholars supposedly familiar with the subject, both here and abroad. Objection was made to almost every character, word, and grammatical construction, as being at variance with proper fourteenth century usage. Particularly were the words *mans*, *illy*, *from*, *þep* and *of vest*, generally and scathingly criticized as showing the influence of English upon the inscription. But these words were later shown by Swedish philologists to be archaic forms, all found in Swedish manuscripts of the fourteenth century; showing, if the inscription is a forgery, an amazing philological learning on the part of its writer.<sup>1</sup> The use of the decimal system was pointed to as an anachronism, too early by two hundred years. Later it was found that the decimal system was generally used by the well-known scholar and public man of affairs, Hauk Erlandson, who died thirty years before the date of the inscription.<sup>2</sup> The strange form of the numerals on the stone was a common objection. These numerals were unknown to all critics, and were consequently designated as an ingenious invention of their author; but Professor Sophus Bugge has shown that these numerals with a few minor differences were in general use in the fourteenth century on the *primstave*,<sup>3</sup> or household calendars of that time.

These are just a few illustrations of how the inscription has been successively vindicated in the attacks by learned opponents. I do not now know of a single word or character which can be pointed to as being at variance with fourteenth century usage. It is not too much to say that if the inscription

<sup>1</sup> For a full discussion of these and other criticized words see my article entitled, "Are there English words on the Kensington Rune-Stone?" in *Records Of The Past*, IX, 240-245; "The Kensington Rune-Stone Abroad," *ibid.*, X, 260-271. See also Professor Fossum's able analysis in the *Norwegian-American*, Feb. 24, 1911.

<sup>2</sup> See Hauk Erlandson's *Algorismus* in *Hauksbok*, a page of which is shown in photostatic copy in Reeves' *Wineland The Good*, opp. p. 104.

<sup>3</sup> See Ole Worm's *Fasti Danici*, (Copenhagen, 1643), p. 69, with comments by Sophus Bugge, in *Norges Indskrifter med de Ældre Runer*, II, 499. See also reproduction and discussion of these *primstaves* in my article "The Kensington Rune-Stone" in *Wisconsin Magazine of History*, December, 1919; pp. 178-180.

is a forgery its author must have possessed a learning equal to, if not superior to the combined learning of all his critics in this field. While these victories do not absolutely prove the inscription to be genuine, they show that the assumed forger must have been a man of most unique erudition and scholarship. Where can we find a scholar of such eminent learning who would stoop to such a laborious and purposeless forgery?

Among the many attacks upon the Kensington stone perhaps the ablest was written by Dr. Helge Gjessing of the University of Christiania.<sup>4</sup> Unfortunately his otherwise able article suffers from a fundamental weakness. He does not approach the subject with an unbiased mind seeking for the truth, but looks only for evidence *against* the inscription. In order that no false impression be conveyed I will quote his own words from the beginning of his article. After having quoted the inscription he says: "Before such a fabulous account as this, one is naturally in advance suspicious, and one is inclined to stamp it as a forgery. But such a judgment demands evidence, and *it is this that we will now seek.*"<sup>5</sup>

Dr. Gjessing devotes most of his space to a discussion of the historical improbabilities of the alleged Kensington expedition. He outlines the Vinland voyages, and calls attention to the Greenland vessel which in 1347 had been to Markland (Labrador), and which on its return was driven out of its course and finally arrived in Iceland. He then continues with a quotation from Professor Gustav Storm as follows:

"When they, the Greenlanders, came to Norway (Bergen) in 1348, they found that the royal merchant vessel had returned to Norway in 1346 and was not expected to depart again soon. This did not take place until 1355. We have a copy of a royal letter of October, 1354, which indicates extraordinary preparations. At the head of the expedition is placed Paul Knutson of Onerheim, and extraordinary power is given him for selecting the personnel of the expedition. The object of

<sup>4</sup> Printed in *Symra*, Decorah, Iowa; 1909, No. 3, pp. 116-119.

<sup>5</sup> "Ovenfor en saa eventyrlig beretning som denne er man naturligvis allerede paa forhaand mistænksom og en er nærmest tilbøielig til uten videre at stemple, det hele som et falsum. Men en saadan dom vil kræve beviser og det er disse som vi vil søge." *ibid.*, 117.

the expedition is stated to be to maintain Christianity in Greenland. . . . This expedition left Bergen in 1355 and did not return until after a number of years, probably not until 1363 or 1364.”<sup>6</sup>

Here Dr. Gjessing finds not only a probability, but almost a certainty, that there was an expedition in American waters between the years 1355 and 1364—the very time during which the Kensington expedition is said to have taken place. One would therefore expect that such a remarkable historical coincidence would put him in an acceptable frame of mind. But not so. The presence of the “eight Goths” stands in his way. He says: “We therefore find that historically there is a possibility that about 1360 there has departed an expedition to American waters. But this would necessarily have been identical with the expedition of Paul Knutson, or upon his initiative fitted out from Greenland. . . . Neither of these alternatives, however, is possible, as the eight Goths would not in any case fit in.”<sup>7</sup>

The presence of these Goths has been offensive to many other commentators besides Dr. Gjessing. From the first critic to the very last this strange mixing of two nationalities in the inscription has been pointed to as something most suspicious. Yet, no word in the inscription is more pertinent. In order, therefore, to remove this misapprehension it is necessary to review briefly some historical developments of the fourteenth century.

In the year 1341 the Bishop of Bergen fitted out an expedition to Greenland. Far away in that land of glaciers lived his old friend, the Bishop of Greenland, from whom he had heard nothing for many years. With the devotion of one friend for another he therefore expended a large part of his wealth in seeking news of his old comrade. He put in command of the expedition a trusty priest of his own diocese, Ivar Bardsen by name.<sup>8</sup> Bardsen reached Greenland in safety, and was per-

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*; also Gustav Storm, *Vinlandsreiserne*, 1888, p. 365.

<sup>7</sup> Gjessing, *op. cit.* p. 118.

<sup>8</sup> A copy of the Bishop's letter is printed in *Grønlands Historiske Mindesmerker*, III, 886-889.

suaded by its bishop to remain there for some time as steward of the properties of the bishopric. It is from Ivar Bardsen's account that we have most of our information about Greenland.

In 1342 Ivar Bardsen and a body of men were sent by the bishop to the Western Settlement of Greenland to bring relief to the settlers there. This western settlement was a small colony of Norsemen, three small parishes, detached from the main settlement by hundreds of miles of glaciers and ice-laden seas. Shortly before this, reports had reached the main settlement that the Eskimos had begun to harass the smaller colony. Bardsen and his party safely reached the Western Settlement, but to their amazement they find no human beings there. The cattle are found grazing on the edge of the fjords, the churches and homes stand undisturbed; no signs of bloodshed or violence is apparent, but not a single human being, whether white man or Eskimo, is seen. Where had the inhabitants gone to? Bardsen could not tell. He loaded his vessel with as many cattle and sheep as it could hold and thereupon returned to the Bishop.

The question has puzzled many commentators as to what could have happened to these settlers of the Western Settlement. Bardsen says nothing about any evidence of bloodshed or warfare, therefore the idea that the colony had been exterminated by the Eskimos may be rejected. "Besides," as Frithiof Nansen comments, "can anyone who knows the Eskimos imagine that they slaughtered the men but not the cattle? These represented food to them, and that is what they would first have turned their attention to."<sup>9</sup> Nor is it possible that the colony arose in a body and joined the Eskimos. These two people were racially different and had little in common. Moreover, they were enemies. Finally they had nothing to gain and much to lose by joining the Eskimos. The food of the Norsemen consisted largely of milk products and fresh beef. By leaving their cattle behind they would be deprived of this food. They would also leave their comfortable homes and favorite fishing grounds along the fjords. To offset these conveniences the nomadic life of the

<sup>9</sup> Nansen, *In Northern Mists*, II, 109.

Eskimos had nothing to offer but the accidental spoils of hunting which the white settlers already possessed.

If they did not join the Eskimos and if they were not exterminated by these Arctic people, the only alternative that will account for the disappearance of the colonists of the Western Settlement is that they emigrated in a body to America. They knew from tradition and possibly from traders that America, or Vinland and Markland, as they called it, was a rich land with a good climate, abounding in big timber, which was the greatest need of the Greenlanders. Left to themselves in that exceedingly bleak and barren part of Greenland, and exposed to the increasingly threatening attacks of the Eskimos, it is not strange if they finally decided to emigrate in a body to a better land where their greatest needs would be supplied.<sup>10</sup> Such mass emigrations are not uncommon in history, and we have several like instances from the same northern regions. When Thorfin Karlsevne in the year 1007 set out for America, he was accompanied by 140 men and women, all of whom decided to cast their lot in the new land. When Erik the Red emigrated to Greenland he was accompanied by no less than twenty-five vessel loads of emigrants, who, persuaded by his exaggerated descriptions of the glories of Greenland, went thither to make their homes. The fact that Bardsen found the cattle of the settlers left behind may be due to the fact that the emigrants could not take all their possessions in one voyage and planned to return for a second load.

This emigration to America is fully corroborated by another annalistic account from the same year which we have in a later copy. Bishop Gisle Oddson, living in the beginning of the seventeenth century, has given us a later copy of earlier annals, and writes under the date of 1342: "The people of Greenland, i.e., the Western Settlement, in 1342 voluntarily gave up the Christian faith and all good morals, and cast their lot with

<sup>10</sup> There is an old account of the thirteenth century, describing life in Greenland, which mentions the fact that the timber on which the Greenlanders depended "came out of the bays of Markland;" quoted in *Grønlands Historiske Mindesmerker*, III, 243.

the people of America (*ad Americae populos se converterunt*). Some say that Greenland lies very near to the Western lands of the world.”<sup>11</sup> The eminent historian, P. A. Munch, comments on this, as follows: “The attacks of the Eskimos were presumably the cause of that which is stated in an account of 1342, viz., that the inhabitants of Greenland fell voluntarily from Christianity and emigrated to other parts of America. . . . This account has all evidence of truth” (*har aldeles troværdighedens præg*).<sup>12</sup>

Finally, ethnological evidence is not lacking to show that such an emigration of white people has actually taken place into the northern parts of North America. The earliest whalers refer to it. Cesar de Rochefort<sup>13</sup> gives an account of the voyage of a ship from Flushing, commanded by Nicholas Tunes, who, in 1656, visited the shores of Baffin Bay. Tunes describes two distinct types of natives. Of these one kind was very tall of stature, well built, and of blond complexion. The other was the common Eskimo. From the same region Dr. Franz Boas<sup>14</sup> has recorded a number of striking traditions of a people called the “Tornit,” which clearly show that at some remote time a people of large physique, other than the Eskimos, lived there. The existence of the “Blond Eskimos” of the Hudson Bay region, seen by many arctic explorers<sup>15</sup> and described particularly by Dr. V. Stefansson,<sup>16</sup> also proves that

<sup>11</sup> “1342. Groenlandia incolæ a vera fide et religione christiana sponte sua defecerunt, et repudiatis omnibus honestis moribus et veris vertutibus ad Americae populos se converterunt; existimant enim quidam Groenlandium adeo vicinam esse occidentalibus orbis regionibus.” The document was translated out of the original records by Finn Magnussen, the eminent editor-in-chief of *Grønlands Historiske Mindesmerker*, and is printed there for the first time in Vol. III, 459.

<sup>12</sup> P. A. Munch, *Det Norske Folks Historie*, Unionsperioden, I, 313, 314. The same interpretation (*udvandring til Amerika*) is also given by Professor Gustav Storm in *Arkiv for Nordisk Filologi*, VI, 356.

<sup>13</sup> *Histoire des Isles Antilles de l'Amérique*, Book I, ch. xviii.

<sup>14</sup> *The Central Eskimo* in the *Sixth Report of the Bureau of Ethnology*, Washington, 1888, p. 634.

<sup>15</sup> See General Greeley's article in *National Geographical Magazine*, December, 1912.

<sup>16</sup> *My Life in the Arctic*, 1913, 191–202.



at some time there must have been a large infusion of blood of a blond race to leave its mark so prominently. In Hovgaard's *Early Voyages of the Northmen*<sup>17</sup> are two remarkable photographs taken by Dr. Stefansson which show fifteen of these reversions to the original type found in a tribe of two hundred Eskimos. Dr. Stefansson says (ibid.): "It is not only the blondness of the Victoria Islander that suggest the European, but also the form of their heads, as shown by measurements of adult males." Commenting on this, Professor Hovgaard says: "The widespread nature of the European characteristics among these tribes seems to show that the mixture took place at a very remote period, and their persistence indicates that European women as well as European men must have been partners in the admixture. Since no intercourse between Eskimos and Europeans appears to have occurred in post-Columbian times, which could account for such a thorough mixing of the races, the only, or at least the most plausible, explanation of the facts recorded by Stefansson seems to be that the Blond Eskimos, as suggested above, are related to the Norse Greenlanders."<sup>18</sup> As the Norse colonies in Greenland came to an end shortly after 1400, this brings us back to the exodus mentioned by Ivar Bardsen and Bishop Gisle Oddson.

The news of this emigration may have reached Norway by several different messengers. In 1346 the royal merchant vessel returned from Greenland, and its crew may have brought the news. In 1348 there arrived in Bergen that company of eighteen Greenlanders who had been to Markland, and who on their return were driven to Iceland. It is possible that these men may have been in personal contact with their emigrated countrymen in Markland.<sup>19</sup> They were accompanied from Iceland to Norway by the prominent politician, Jon Guttormson, who, being temporarily in public and royal disfavor, was now on his way to plead his cause before the king. It is probable that the news was laid before the king by the latter,

<sup>17</sup> Opposite pages 46 and 48.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 50.

<sup>19</sup> This contact is suggested by Munch, *op. cit.*, 314.

for, as bearer of such important news, his journey to the king would gain greatly in dignity. We know that he actually reached the king and was immediately restored to royal favor.

We may assume that the pious monarch, Magnus Erikson, must have been prompted to take immediate steps to go to the rescue of the tottering colonies and their churches in Greenland. However, the same year, 1348, there came to Norway and Sweden that terrible plague, the Black Death, which laid low one-half of the population of his kingdoms. The king was also at the same time engaged in a disastrous crusade or holy war with Russia. The royal treasury was completely depleted, and ruin stared the king in the face.

In spite of these desperate internal conditions we find the king soon turning his attention to the needs of Greenland. We have a copy of a letter issued by him, in which it is stated that he fitted out an extraordinary expedition to Greenland. There is no suggestion of commerce or warfare in the stated object of the expedition—its aim is solely to see that Christianity does not perish in Greenland. At its head is placed Paul Knutson, the law-speaker of Gulathing, and one of the most eminent noblemen of Norway. The following is a translation of the letter:

Magnus, by the grace of God, King of Norway, Sweden and Skaane, sends to all men who see or hear this letter good health and happiness.

We desire to make known to you that you are to take all the men who shall go in the Knorr (the royal vessel), whether they be named or not named, from my retinue or from among the retainers of other men whom you may wish to take on the voyage, and that Paul Knutson, who shall be the chief upon the Knorr, shall have full authority to select the men who he thinks are best suited to accompany him, whether as officers or men. We ask that you accept this our command with a right good will for the cause, inasmuch as we do it for the honor of God and for the sake of our soul and for the sake of our predecessors who in Greenland established Christianity and have maintained in to this time, and *we will not now let it perish in our days*. Know this for truth, that whoever defies this our command shall meet with our serious displeasure and thereupon receive full punishment.

Executed in Bergen, Monday after Simon and Judah's day (October 28), in the six and XXX year of our rule (1354). By Orm Ostenson, Lord High Constable of Norway, sealed.<sup>20</sup>

<sup>20</sup> An ancient Danish translation of this document is printed in *Grønlands Historiske Mindesmerker*, III, 120–122. Cf. also Storm's *Studier over Vinlands-reiserne*, p. 365.

According to Professor Storm and others, this expedition sailed from Norway in 1355 and did not return until 1363 or 1364. If we assume that Greenland was its only objective, it becomes very difficult to explain its long absence from home. The commander, Paul Knutson, was a most important man of those times, being one of the king's *Lendermænd* and a large landowner. Part of his crew is said to be from the king's retinue, i.e., all noblemen of the best families.<sup>21</sup> It is inconceivable that such men of affairs and social prominence would linger year after year in the dreary little colony of Greenland.

But if in the king's words that he "would not now let Christianity perish" in Greenland, we see a reference to the apostasy of the Greenlanders who emigrated to America in 1342, then we find abundant reason for the long absence of the expedition. The only place where Christianity was threatened in Greenland was the Western Settlement. There it was not only threatened, but had completely succumbed to adverse conditions, as was witnessed by the empty churches and deserted homesteads described by Ivar Bardsen. If Paul Knutson was to restore Christian worship to these deserted temples—as was his mission according to the king's mandate—it would be necessary for him to seek these apostates among the people of America whither they had gone, and then either compel them to return or accept the Faith in their new homes.

As pious Catholics, Paul Knutson and his men would be horrified at the thought of these people's renouncing Christianity, and thus, according to the belief of the times, selling themselves to the Devil. As devout sons of the Medieval Church, the king and his messengers would feel it their duty to follow these apostates to the ends of the earth and make every effort to save them from damnation.<sup>22</sup> This unquestion-

<sup>21</sup> P. A. Munch, *Det Norske Folks Historie*, Unionsperioden, I, 414, 415.

<sup>22</sup> We have as proof of the king's great missionary zeal, e.g., his two wars with Russia (A. D. 1348 and 1351) which were waged by him, with the documentary and financial assistance of the Pope, for the sole purpose of converting the heathen. See Munch, *op. cit.*, 530-536; also Gjerset's *History of the Norwegian People*, II, 15. Participation in such enterprises was eagerly sought by the soldiers of the times, since this meant complete absolution from all sins. It is probably for this reason that the king suggested to Paul Knutson that he give members of his retinue a place in the expedition.

ing devotion to a religious ideal explains fully the long absence from home of the expedition.

We, therefore, see the probability, as Dr. Gjessing admits, that there actually was a Norse expedition in American waters about 1360. This view is supported by Professor Storm.<sup>23</sup> Even Professor Frithiof Nansen, who is extremely skeptical about all names and dates connected with the Vinland voyages, thinks it probable that Paul Knutson's mission also required him "to explore the fertile countries further west," i.e., America.<sup>24</sup> Let us now see what points of agreement or disagreement there are between the Kensington expedition and that of Paul Knutson.

I. The date on the Kensington stone is 1362; the date of the Knutson journey is 1355-1364. There is, therefore, perfect agreement in point of time.

II. Both expeditions had by 1362 been gone a long time from their home countries. This is shown on the Kensington stone by the statement that the thirty explorers had come "from Vinland," indicating a lengthy stay in America. If they had but recently arrived, they would have said "from Norway," etc. By 1362 the Knutson expedition had been gone seven years.

III. The time of return to Norway seems to coincide for both expeditions. We learn in the Kensington inscription that the thirty explorers who penetrated into what is now Minnesota were not all of the expedition. Some of its members were "down by the sea" (Hudson Bay) with their vessel. These men by the vessel would necessarily wait in Hudson Bay until the ice broke up in the summer of 1363. Then, despairing of the return of their friends, they would presumably seek their safety by returning via Vinland and Greenland to Norway, which they would be able to reach late in the autumn of 1363, or more likely, in 1364. According to Storm and Gjessing, the Knutson expedition returned in 1363 or 1364.

IV. There is reason to believe that both expeditions had a fortified base of operations on the Atlantic coast. This is

<sup>23</sup> G. Storm, *Studier over Vinlandsreiserne*, 1888, p. 365.

<sup>24</sup> F. Nansen, *In Northern Mists*, II, p. 38.

clearly indicated on the Kensington stone where we are told that the explorers came, not from Norway, but from Vinland, which can only refer to a well established centre of operations on the Atlantic coast. The building of such a base of operations would also be the first logical step for Paul Knutson to take after landing in America. His mission was to search for a colony of apostatized fellow subjects who were somewhere to be found within the vast reaches of an unknown country. Prudence would dictate the building of a fortified base of operations where his supplies could be stored and to which the explorers could retreat with safety if threatened by the enemy.

V. Probability points to the fact that both expeditions followed the same general route. All scholars who believe in the authenticity of the Kensington inscription are agreed that the Kensington explorers must have come by way of Hudson Bay. It is reasonable to suppose that the Greenlanders, who emigrated to America in 1342, continued westward on the same climatic parallel to which they were accustomed in Greenland; which would bring them to northern Labrador or Baffin Land. Here is just where Dr. Boaz collected his traditions of the *Tornii*, a large and strange people who were said to have sojourned among the Eskimos. From here, too, westward into the region of Hudson Bay have been found those Blond Eskimos who clearly show a considerable intermarriage with white men.

Paul Knutson and his party, coming from a mild climate, would at first naturally seek for the Greenlanders in Vinland, which also had a mild climate and which was known by tradition to the Norsemen. Here he would build his fortified base of operations. Later, not finding them in this vicinity, Knutson would come to the conclusion that they had gone to a country whose climatic conditions correspond to their own in Greenland. Accordingly, he would go further north. Searching for them here, their trail would lead him into Hudson Bay.

VI. Both expeditions seem to have numbered among their members one or more priests. This is indicated on the Kensington stone by the pious character of the inscription, by the

knowledge of Latin words and characters as shown in the letters *A V M* (*Ave Maria*) and by the fact that the explorers were able to leave an inscription in writing, an accomplishment almost unknown to all but the clergy. In the Knutson expedition, which professedly was an enterprise for the maintenance of Christianity, there surely was a priest.

VII. Finally, the general personnel of the two expeditions was the same. King Magnus Erikson, by whose command the Knutson expedition was fitted out, was the first king of Norway who was not a descendant of Harold the Fairhaired line on his father's side. Magnus was a descendant of the famous *Folkunga* family of Götaland,<sup>25</sup> and he was throughout his life a Goth of provincial interests. The act of agreement entered into between Sweden and Norway, when Magnus was chosen king of both, required him to spend his time equally in both countries. This promise was ignored by Magnus, who very rarely visited Norway, spending most of his time in Götaland. For this reason the Norwegian people compelled him in 1343 to abdicate the throne of Norway in favor of his son Hakon, to take effect when Hakon reached his age of majority in 1355.<sup>26</sup> In the meantime he was permitted to hold the royal power in trust only. Nor was he popular in Sweden. This was chiefly because the Swedish noblemen became dissatisfied with the favoritism which the king always showed to the nobles and clergy of his paternal province, Götaland. He established his royal residence at Ljodhus in Götaland and here he spent all of his leisure time. When in 1347 he made his will, he bequeathed almost his entire fortune to the Vadstena Nunnery in Götaland.<sup>27</sup> Ignoring local expectations, he placed the government of the various parts of his kingdom in the hands of his favorites, the nobles and clergy of Götaland. For instance, Orm Eysteinson, a Goth, was made Lord High Constable of Norway.<sup>28</sup> Johan Karlsson and Nicolas Markusson, the king's two successive chancellors, were both Goths.<sup>29</sup>

<sup>25</sup> The Swedish spelling of this province is used to distinguish it from the island of Gothland.

<sup>26</sup> P. A. Munch, *Det Norske Folks Historie*, Unionsperioden, I, 289-295.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 478.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 521, 667, note 3.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 544, 646.

So too, Israel Byrgeson, whom the king appointed as vicegerent, or general supervisor (*Officialis Generalis*) to act during the years of his wars with Russia, was a Goth.<sup>30</sup> Benedikt Algotsson, another Goth, was made Duke of Halland and Finland and Governor of Skane.<sup>31</sup> This last act of favoritism finally offended the aristocracy of Sweden so greatly that they prevailed upon his son Erik to raise the standard of revolt and Magnus was compelled to yield the throne to him.<sup>32</sup> The king thus lost both his crowns, but he was permitted to hold for his personal support the government of Vestgötaland, the Western islands, and certain other provinces. In view of his ancestry and place of residence, his favoritism to the Goths, and the dislike in which he was held by the nobility of other parts of Sweden, it is certain that his personal retinue consisted almost exclusively of Goths.

In the letter which King Magnus in 1354, while still holding in trust the crown of Norway for his son Hakon, writes to Paul Knutson, he commands him to select the men for the expedition from two sources: (1) "from my retinue" (*fra mine haandgangne mænd*) and (2) from the retainers of other men. If Paul Knutson did not wish to offend the king and his retinue, he would follow his instructions. He would choose some of his followers from among the nobles that made up the king's retinue, who were Goths. He would also avail himself of the opportunity offered in the second clause, and select some Norwegians of his own acquaintance around Bergen. The expedition would therefore be composed partly of Goths and partly of Norwegians. On the Kensington stone we read of eight Goths and twenty-two Norwegians. The greater dignity of the Goths, as noblemen of the king's bodyguard, is implied in the fact that they are mentioned first.

Therefore, instead of these Goths being a historical misfit, serving as an insurmountable objection to the identification of

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 488.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 589-594.

<sup>32</sup> When Erik shortly afterward died and a German, Albrecht Albrechtson, was chosen King of Sweden, only the people of Vestgötaland remained loyal to King Magnus and took up arms in his defense. *Ibid.*, 765; Styffe's *Bidrag till Skandinaviens Historia*, No. 36 (pp. 62-118).

the Kensington expedition with the Knutson expedition, we see how indispensable these Goths are when viewed in the light of the peculiar political conditions of the times. Their little understood presence in the inscription is the best possible internal evidence of its truth. It is one of those little hall-marks of genuineness which an imitator fails to appreciate but which so naturally marks the true producer.

The perfect chronological and characteristic agreement between these two expeditions is so apparent and so conclusive that a vital connection is evident. The Kensington inscription is either a true account of 1362 or its author must in recent years have heard of the Knutson expedition, understood its scope and personnel, and shaped his account to agree with this. For this reason, Professor Halvdan Koht, Professor of History at the University of Christiania, said to me in 1911: "If you can prove that the inscription was made before 1888 you have won your case." Why 1888? Because in that year for the first time the suggestion was made, by Professor Gustav Storm, that the practically unknown Knutson Expedition may have visited America.<sup>33</sup>

Now there is no difficulty in proving that the inscription was made before 1888. We have an affidavit from Nils Flaten, a worthy farmer living near Kensington, stating that the stone was found immediately in front of and in plain view of his house, not more than five hundred feet away across an open marsh. The affidavit further brings out the fact that he had lived continuously at the same spot since 1884 and that the house had never been untenanted during that time. It was therefore impossible secretly to cut the inscription or bury the stone while Mr. Flaten and his large family had the spot under constant observation.<sup>34</sup>

Furthermore, the Museum Committee of the Minnesota Historical Society have very thoroughly investigated the circumstances connected with the discovery of the stone. They

<sup>33</sup> Gustav Storm, *Studier over Vinlandsreiserne*, Copenhagen, 1888, also printed in *Aarbøger for nordisk Oldkyndighed*, 1888, p. 365.

<sup>34</sup> The affidavit was obtained by Dr. Knut Hoegh, and is on file in his office in the Masonic temple, Minneapolis, Minn.



state that the stone must have been in its finding place at least as long as the tree which clasped it in its roots grew there. This tree they find (by counting the rings of four other trees of the same species growing in the same place) was approximately fifty years old.<sup>35</sup> This brings us back to 1847, several years before there was a single farmer in the entire state of Minnesota, to a time when the Indians and the wild beasts ruled undisturbed over all that country.

Finally, the weathering of the inscription has been studied by three professional geologists. Professor W. O. Hotchkiss stated that the inscription was "at least fifty to a hundred years old"; Dr. Warren Upham stated that it was "several hundred years old," and Professor N. H. Winchell after a lengthy discussion concludes that it is "probably five hundred years old."<sup>36</sup> The possibility that the Paul Knutson expedition was suggested to the runemaster by Professor Storm is, therefore, completely excluded.

This remarkable rune-stone, which was rejected by the builders of our knowledge, has withstood every surge of criticism for a quarter of a century, and now promises to become one of the corner-stones of our history. It is the only runic inscription ever found in America, but it is the most remarkable of all such monuments, for it adds a new chapter to America's history—a chapter thrilling with dramatic interest. At the same time this rune-stone adds another great achievement to Norway's heroic age, just at the time when it terminates in its dull sleep of four hundred years. Moreover, when fully understood, the Kensington inscription is a record of exploration to kindle the admiration of any reader. For these men did not, like the later Spaniards, come across the vast seas inflamed by thoughts of conquest and plunder; they gave up their homes, their pleasures, and their lives, impelled only by the high purpose of bringing some half barbaric fellow-subjects back to the saving grace of the church. As to the final outcome of this first missionary expedition to America, we know

<sup>35</sup> *Minnesota Historical Society Collections*, XV, 223, 224, also plates IV and V.

<sup>36</sup> These three statements are printed in full in *Wis. Mag. of His.*, Dec., 1919, pp. 175, 176.

nothing for the archives were lost. Perhaps they were never written, since it is probable that none of these thirty explorers—the first martyrs of the West—returned to their comrades to tell the tale. They chiselled a few words about their great adventure upon a stone in the wilderness and then disappeared.

Yet it is not impossible that we shall eventually learn more of them, for from time to time the soil has yielded up new remarkable testimonials of their presence. These unexpected corroborations consist of a number of implements which have been unearthed in northwestern Minnesota. Taken in connection with the rune-stone they mutually support and explain each other, for these finds are all of the fourteenth century in origin and Scandinavian in type. They are, moreover, just such implements as these explorers would be likely to have carried with them, and they are found just where these explorers are said to have been. These finds consist of a bronze-handled sword, an antique broadaxe, a fire-steel, a bill-hook, a small axe and a brass ornament containing a measure scale which passed out of use about 1400.<sup>37</sup> Affidavits have been obtained from the various finders and their neighbors, setting forth the circumstances of their discovery, and showing that they could not have been brought in by any of the early settlers.

HJALMAR R. HOLAND

*Ephraim, Wisconsin*

<sup>37</sup> All of these finds were exhibited by Mr. Holand to the Society for the Advancement of Scandinavian Study at its eleventh annual meeting held at St. Olaf College, Northfield, Minn., May 6, 1921. Mr. Holand's paper was received by the Society on that occasion with great interest (cf. p. 184 of this number).—*Editor*.